

INTER-PARLIAMENTARY UNION

BRITISH GROUP

PALACE OF WESTMINSTER

LONDON SW1A 0AA

THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

WEDNESDAY 12 NOVEMBER 2008

THE ATTLEE SUITE

PORTCULLIS HOUSE

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The Annual General Meeting of the British Group of the Inter-Parliamentary Union was held in The Attlee Suite, Portcullis House, Westminster, on Wednesday, 12 November 2008. The Honorary President, the Rt Hon Michael Martin MP, Mr Speaker, was in the chair.

### **Opening remarks by Mr. Speaker**

**MR SPEAKER:** My Lords, ladies and gentlemen, I now call this Annual General Meeting to order and I extend a very warm welcome to everybody. You will see from the Annual Report that the British Group of the IPU has had another productive year of activity, about which we will hear more later. There is a proposal in the agenda to change the Group's rules on membership of the Executive Committee. Under the revised rules, all members standing for election as officers or members of the Executive Committee are unopposed. Therefore, there will not be a ballot today.

When this meeting ends, you are all invited to go next door to the ante-room for some refreshments. This meeting will follow the normal pattern and so in accordance with the agenda, which you all have before you, I will move on to item 2.

### **Apologies for absence**

**MR SPEAKER:** The second item on the agenda is apologies for absence. Do we have any apologies?

**GENERAL SECRETARY:** Mr Speaker, I have a list of 64 names.

### **Minutes of the Annual General Meeting held on Wednesday, 5 December 2007**

**MR SPEAKER:** We are now required to adopt the Minutes of the Annual General Meeting held on Wednesday, 5 December 2007. The Minutes are printed on pages 9 to 24 of the Annual Report. May I have a proposer and a seconder that the Minutes be adopted as a true record of the meeting? (*Proposed by Lord Jopling and seconded by Lord Morris*)

Is it agreed that the Minutes are a correct record? (*Agreed*) I will now sign the Minutes as a true record of the meeting. (*Minutes signed*)

### **Matters arising from the Minutes**

**MR SPEAKER:** Are there any matters arising from the Minutes?

**GENERAL SECRETARY:** None have been notified.

### **Presentation of the Financial Statement for April 2007 to March 2008 by Sir Nicholas Winterton (and appointment of auditors)**

**MR SPEAKER:** I would like to invite Sir Nicholas Winterton DL MP, Treasurer of the Group, to present the Financial Statement.

**SIR NICHOLAS WINTERTON MP:** Thank you Mr Speaker. My Lords, ladies and gentlemen, I have the pleasure of presenting the Financial Statement and Statement of Internal Control for the year ending 31 March 2008. Copies have been placed on seats. If anyone cannot find one, please raise your hand and we will provide one. We have with us Jonathan Downer and Amy Hwang from our auditors, KPMG.

I start with the statements. On pages 1 to 3 you will find our Statement of Internal Control with my signature on page 3, and page 4 contains the Statement of the Executive Committee's responsibilities. Page 5 gives the auditors' report, which declares that the Financial Statement gives a true and fair view of the state of our affairs as on 31 March 2008. Furthermore, I should add that our Audit Committee has received a report from KPMG on our accounts and finance procedures, and was satisfied that there were no items of concern to report.

Let us look at the numbers. The income and expenditure account is on page 6 and you will see that income from all sources amounted to a little over £1.2 million. The major change this year is that as from 1 April 2008, our grant in aid income comes from the Houses of Parliament—70 per cent. from the House of Commons and 30 per cent. from the House of Lords.

I will now move on to expenditure. Subscription expenses are paid to the IPU headquarters annually and are set in Swiss francs. There has been an adverse movement of the exchange rate between sterling and the Swiss currency which, taken with a planned realignment of subscriptions to reduce the burden on poorer countries, has resulted in an increase of 5.2 per cent on the previous year. The cost of conferences and outward delegations has increased by nearly £56,000. There are two main reasons for this. First, there has been an increase in the number of staff travelling to Assemblies to undertake duties in support of the chairmanship of our geopolitical group, which started in 2007-08. The second reason is that the cost of travel to the venue for the IPU Assembly and for specialist conferences was considerably more expensive than in the previous year.

The cost of inward delegations and seminars has risen in comparison to the previous year. The average cost of inward delegations for the year ending 31 March 2007 was £19,180 — slightly lower than the year before. For the year ending 31 March 2008, the equivalent average was £28,317 — an increase of just over £9,000. However, both figures are within budget and the difference is explained mainly by reduced delegation sizes and shorter than normal programmes in the earlier year.

The take-up of grants to All-Party Country Group activities has declined from the previous year. Staff costs, including salaries and national insurance, have declined by 8.8 per cent. That is a result of the departure of a senior member of staff in the previous year, and a realignment of the staff structure of the Group's secretariat. Other costs are broadly in line with the previous year. As you can see, the Group had a surplus of £89,089 on the income and expenditure account for the year.

I now look at the balance sheet on page 7. The cash at bank and in hand has increased by a little over £114,000. That includes the cash fund of the 12-Plus geopolitical group of the IPU—some £71,000—which is on our books as a creditor,

as shown in the notes at the top of page 10. That concludes my presentation on the Financial Statement. Are there any questions?

**MR SPEAKER:** Thank you.

**SIR NICHOLAS WINTERTON MP:** I propose the adoption of the Financial Statement for the year ending 31 March 2008 and the appointment of KPMG LLP as auditors for the year ending 31 March 2009.

**MR SPEAKER:** Sir Nicholas Winterton has proposed the Financial Statement for the year ending 31 March 2008 and the appointment of KPMG to be the Group's auditors for the coming year. May I ask for a Seconder?

*(Secoded by John Austin MP)*

**LORD JOPLING:** Mr Speaker, I do think that it is bad practice for the accounts of organisations such as this to be presented to members at the meeting. I believe that accounts should have been distributed in advance.

**SIR NICHOLAS WINTERTON MP:** May I respond to the point raised by Lord Jopling? Perhaps the Audit Committee, of which he is a member, should address the sound point he makes about distributing the accounts?

**DR PHYLLIS STARKEY MP:** I am Chair of the Audit Committee and the audited accounts have been discussed in the Committee. The circulation of the accounts before the AGM is a matter for the Executive Committee to decide.

**SIR NICHOLAS WINTERTON MP:** Indeed, this is a matter that should be referred to the Executive Committee before the next AGM. The General Secretary has informed me that we have followed the same procedure for many years.

**MR SPEAKER:** I thank you, Sir Nicholas. Is it agreed that we adopt the report and appoint KPMG as auditors? *(Agreed)*

### **Adoption of the Annual Report for 2008**

**MR SPEAKER:** I now invite Mr. Michael Foster, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State in the Department for International Development, to propose the adoption of the Annual Report for 2008.

**MICHAEL FOSTER MP:** Mr Speaker, colleagues, I am delighted to have been invited to join this Annual General Meeting and to propose the adoption of the 2008 Annual Report. I am also pleased to be joined by Baroness Rawlings, who will second the motion.

The Inter-Parliamentary Union plays a key role in fostering understanding and co-operation between nations around the world. Its members work together in the spirit of friendship and without party labels, meeting to discuss issues of international concern, even when their governments are in dispute. Under the excellent

chairmanship of Roger Berry MP, the work of the British Group continues to make an important contribution to that.

I want to commend Roger on his first year as Chair. His work last April at the 118th Assembly in Cape Town to agree a statement on the crisis in Zimbabwe was outstanding. Last month, he headed the team participating in the 119th Assembly in Geneva, and made a significant contribution to the debate on the global financial crisis and its economic impact in both developed and developing countries.

The whole British Group has had a busy year. As well as numerous conferences and meetings over the last 12 months, the group welcomed delegations from Cuba, Gabon, the Republic of Moldova, Algeria and Nicaragua. It also sent delegations to Cambodia, Vietnam, Albania, Japan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Iceland, Ukraine and Kyrgyzstan. I was especially pleased to learn that in Kyrgyzstan, the delegation was impressed with the excellent collaboration between officials from the Department for International Development and local people. It is important that DFID and the IPU move in the same direction. Both DFID and the IPU recognise we live in an interdependent world and that we are linked with communities across the globe. We may never have met, but our actions impact on other communities, and their actions on us. That is why the internationalist outlook of the IPU is so important for a thriving UK Parliament.

All that remains is for me to thank you for inviting me to join you here to propose the adoption of the 2008 Annual Report. I am glad to do so. On behalf of DFID, I wish you a productive year ahead, and look forward to continuing our work together. *(Applause)*

**MR SPEAKER:** I invite Baroness Patricia Rawlings, Opposition Spokesperson for International Development and for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, to second the adoption of the Annual Report for 2008. *(Applause)*

**BARONESS RAWLINGS:** Chairman, Members and Associate Members, it is a great honour to be here to second the adoption of the Annual Report. I know what a busy year it has been for the British branch, and I know what a difference its visits to fledgling democracies will have made. Some may think, especially in these straightened times, that the IPU is a kind of holiday society for parliamentarians. However, anyone who reads this year's report, and who learns about the trips to Kyrgyzstan, to Ukraine and to Japan, will understand what valuable work is being done, and how greatly it is appreciated abroad.

Like Mike Foster, I would like to thank Dr. Roger Berry for all the hard work that he has put in this year as Chairman. He has done a great job, and has ensured that British parliamentary expertise has been shared with the people who need it most. Working in the Palace of Westminster, surrounded by so many reminders of an ancient and stable past, it is easy to forget what a dangerous enterprise democracy can be. It is many hundreds of years since anyone in Britain put their lives at risk merely by becoming a parliamentarian. However, in many developing regions of the world, standing for Parliament requires not just moral courage and conviction, but physical courage too. The brave men and women who put their lives in danger to bring freedom to their fellow citizens need and require all the help they can get. Through

advice from its members, the IPU helps such people build their experiences and strengthen their democracy. By showing them the example of our own system, the IPU provides hope for the future. It is indispensable work, and much of it is documented in this Annual Report. I am proud to second the motion. (*Applause*)

**MR SPEAKER:** The Annual Report has now been proposed and seconded. Is it agreed that we adopt the Annual Report? (*Agreed*)

### **Proposed amendment to Rule 9 (2) and (3) ‘The Executive Committee’.**

**MR SPEAKER:** I invite Mr. Kenneth Courtenay, Secretary of the Group, to present the proposed amendment to Rule 9 ‘The Executive Committee’.

**GENERAL SECRETARY:** The proposed amendment to Rule 9 is a consequence of the transfer of BGIPU funding on 1 April 2008 from HM Treasury to the Houses of Commons and Lords. The Executive Committee proposes that the composition of the Committee shall reflect the proportion of funding by each House: 70 per cent from the House of Commons and 30 per cent from the House of Lords. In light of this, the proposed amendment to Rule 9 (2) increases the number of Members from the House of Lords elected to the Executive Committee from five to seven. Rule 9 (3) proposes that at least one Peer—instead of only one — shall be drawn from the Cross Benches, and no more than three Peers — rather than two — shall be from any one Party. The number of Peers belonging to any one Opposition party shall never exceed the number of Peers of the parties of Government.

**MR SPEAKER:** Thank you, Kenneth. The Executive Committee proposes that Rule 9 (2) and (3) be amended as set out in the notice of the AGM distributed on 13 October 2008 and as described by the Secretary. Is it agreed that we adopt this amendment? (*Agreed*)

Mover: Rt Hon the Lord Kilclooney

Seconder: Rt Hon the Lord Joplin DL

### **The Election of Officers and the Executive Committee for the Period 2008-09**

**MR SPEAKER:** We now move on to the Election of Officers and the Executive Committee. I have to announce that Baroness Boothroyd, Lord Roper, Wayne David MP, Ann McKechin MP, Anne Snelgrove MP, Derek Conway MP and Paul Keetch MP will be standing down as members of the Executive Committee. I am sure that this meeting will agree to record its appreciation for all their contributions and commitment to the British Group and the IPU itself.

As I announced at the beginning, all the Officers and Executive Committee Members that are standing for election are unopposed. These names have already been circulated to members in a letter dated 28 October 2008. I hereby declare that they are duly elected. The new list of Officers and Executive Committee Members will be placed in the IPU Room, the No Lobby and on the Group’s website.

**Any other business**

**MR SPEAKER:** Do we have any other business?

**GENERAL SECRETARY:** None notified.

### **Speech by the Chair**

**MR SPEAKER:** I invite Dr Roger Berry to take the floor.

**DR ROGER BERRY MP:** Mr Speaker, my Lords, Ladies and Gentlemen, I should like to start by expressing thanks on behalf of the Group to a number of people. First, to the Speaker for again chairing our AGM and for all the work he does to support our Group as one of our Honorary Presidents, including the hospitality he has given to visiting delegations in Speaker's House. I also thank our other Honorary President, the Lord Speaker, for all that she does to support our activities, and I thank Michael Foster and Baroness Rawlings for proposing and seconding the adoption of our Annual Report. Many of our contacts are with countries where development issues are the main concern. So it is appropriate that, on this occasion, our Proposer and Secunder should have interests in DFID. Finally, I thank our Treasurer, Sir Nicholas Winterton, for his report and for taking good care of our money.

As you know, this has been my first year as Chair of the British Group of the IPU and this is my first address to an AGM. I would therefore like to take this opportunity to thank my predecessor, Ann Clwyd, for her outstanding contribution to the IPU during her three years as Chair. Ann has also served on the IPU's Committee on Human Rights for five years and chaired it for three. She is now chair of the IPU's Committee on Middle East Questions. Ann is a real champion of human rights and deserves our thanks for all that she does in this important area of work. *(Applause)*

I am also pleased to report that another past Chair, John Austin, has been re-elected unopposed as Chair of the 12+ Group. This reflects the high esteem in which he is held by our colleagues in the IPU, and I would like to thank John for all he does on our behalf.

I would like to thank all my colleagues who have served on the Executive Committee during the past year and those who have participated in our outward and inward delegations, and I extend particular thanks to our General Secretary, Ken, and to our staff who do a wonderful job for the Group. We could not function without them; they serve us well and we are very grateful. Finally, thanks also to the FCO and DFID, Ministers, officials, embassy and high commission staff for their considerable help in setting up our activities. And thanks to Ministers for agreeing to meet our visiting delegations. This is greatly appreciated by them and by the Group. I am pleased that on this occasion we have a DFID Minister with us.

The IPU, of course exists to strengthen dialogue between parliamentarians throughout the world and to support parliamentary democracy. The need for this is as great now as it was when the IPU was founded.

So many of today's most important political issues are not susceptible to national solutions – until recently the familiar list of such issues would include climate change,

energy security, terrorism, world poverty. Now we must add financial and economic turbulence and uncertainty.

It is therefore more important than ever that parliamentarians from around the world share their understanding of these problems and how best they can be addressed. Dialogue with parliamentarians from other countries is important and it is not immodest to say that it can have a bearing on how our country is viewed by others. This requires the co-operation of everyone.

If outward delegations take place when Parliament is sitting, it is of course necessary for the Whips to grant permission for colleagues to participate. These times are often not of our choosing, but are the most convenient times for our hosts. It does seem to me that, with goodwill on all sides, it should not be difficult to create arrangements whereby outward delegations when Parliament is sitting present no problem to either government or opposition. And I very much hope that this is our experience over the next 12 months.

Details of our outward and inward delegations this year have already been reported. There has been less activity than we had planned due to the three short notice cancellations beyond our control.

The Group has also funded a number of visits organised by our affiliated All Party Groups. We have sent delegations to specialist conferences and meetings – including the Commission on the Status of Women at the UN and conferences on other important issues such as migration and human trafficking.

And, of course, we sent delegations to the IPU Assemblies in Cape Town and Geneva.

The Assembly in Cape Town, in April, took place soon after the elections in Zimbabwe. Given the venue of the Assembly, it was hardly surprising that events in Zimbabwe dominated informal and formal discussions. At the official opening, it was notable that President Mbeki did not mention Zimbabwe, but that Mrs Mbete, the Speaker of South Africa's National Assembly, was forthright in her view that, as she put it, "Democracy had gone wrong" in Zimbabwe and that, "the world cannot simply look away".

Speaker Mbete therefore invited a small group of delegates, of whom I was one, to draft a statement on Zimbabwe to be put to the Assembly. A strong statement, supporting the right of the people of Zimbabwe "to determine their future through free and fair elections", was subsequently carried unanimously by the Assembly. Since some countries represented are not entirely committed to free and fair elections, I doubt if such a strong resolution would have been carried without the leadership of Speaker Mbete and the South African delegation.

One question put to me in Cape Town caused me some embarrassment. During a radio interview, I was asked what I thought about the fact that only one of our delegates was a woman. My reply was: "It's shameful." I apologised and said that we would do more to try to secure a better gender balance in future delegations.

There are two things we can do. First, for some delegations we attract a disappointingly small number of applications, and so we must encourage more colleagues to apply for outward delegations and to participate in hosting inward delegations. Secondly, to enable the Selection Committee to select delegations that are more gender balanced, we must encourage more women colleagues to apply.

I am pleased to say that in February we will be hosting a special seminar for the 12+ group on Disability Issues, following the recent publication by the IPU and the UN of a handbook for parliamentarians on the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Personally I think that that is overdue, but I am pleased that it is being held here at Westminster.

In conclusion, I believe that we have had a successful year. We are always looking for ways to improve our contribution to the objectives of the IPU. May I urge you all to continue to actively participate in the work of the Group and to encourage colleagues in both Houses to do likewise. *(Applause)*

Thank you for your attendance and for your support for the Group.

**MR SPEAKER:** Thank you

#### **Closure of meeting**

**MR SPEAKER:** You are all invited to go next door to the ante-room for refreshments, especially our Associate and Honorary Members. I now declare this meeting closed.